



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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CONVICTED PEDOPHILE FACES FEDERAL CHARGES FOR USING INTERNET TO LURE OREGON TEEN TO PALM SPRINGS FOR SEX

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. – A Palm Springs man was arrested this afternoon by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents for using the Internet to entice an Oregon youth to Palm Springs to engage in sexual activity.

Britton Wayne Pitts, 39, was named in a two-count indictment handed down today charging him with using the Internet to coerce a minor to engage in criminal sexual activity and transporting a minor across state lines with the intent to engage in criminal sexual activity.

The allegations stem from an incident in May 2003 when Pitts arranged for a then-14-year-old boy he met online to travel to Palm Springs, where he sexually assaulted him. The former casino security guard is expected to make his initial appearance in federal court Monday. If convicted on the two counts, Pitts faces a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in prison and maximum penalty of 60 years.

The case involving Pitts was originally investigated by the Palm Springs Police Department, leading to the filing of state charges by the Riverside District Attorney's Office. Pitts pleaded guilty to six counts of sodomy with a person under 16 and oral copulation with a person under 16. He was sentenced to probation and time served, which amounted to approximately 180 days. Upon his release from prison, Pitts began frequenting Internet chat rooms where he contacted his original victim. For violating the terms of his probation, Pitts was taken back into custody and sentenced to three years in prison. Pitts, who ended up serving 18 months of that sentence, was released last month.

The Palm Springs Police Department sought ICE's assistance in the case after the Department's investigation revealed that federal violations were potentially involved because Pitts brought the boy over state lines for the purpose of sexual exploitation, a crime not normally prosecuted on the state level.

The federal charges against Pitts are part of Operation Predator, a comprehensive ICE initiative aimed at those who prey on children, including human traffickers, international sex tourists, Internet pornographers, and foreign national predators whose crimes make them deportable. Nearly 900 of the 5,900 child sex offenders arrested by ICE nationwide as part of Operation Predator have been made by agents assigned to the Los Angeles ICE office.

“This kind of conduct poses a serious threat to the well-being of our children, our families, and our communities,” said Gary Pinkava, assistant special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in the Inland Empire. “We will continue to work closely with our local law enforcement partners to identify, arrest, and prosecute those who prey on and exploit the children here in Southern California.”

Additional information about Operation Predator is available on the Web at www.ice.gov. ICE encourages the reporting of suspected child predators and any suspicious activity through its toll-free hotline at 1-866-DHS-2ICE. This hotline is staffed around the clock by investigators. Suspected child sexual exploitation or missing children may be reported to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, an Operation Predator partner, at 1-800-843-5678 or <http://www.cybertipline.com>.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.